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AUTHOR Brown, Frank
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ABSTRACT

This study examined the views of students, parents, and teachers in three urban middle schools and one elementary school regarding important elements of the school counseling function. Respondents completed a questionnaire with a Likert-type scale, ranging from 0 to 7, on which they rated the importance of several counseling functions such as: Should the parent approve his/her child's program of study? Should the counselor assist students with course selection? Should the counselor handle discipline problems? Generally, all respondents felt that counselors should take an active role in planning a student's program of study and career direction. However, all respondents felt that counselors should not be involved with discipline. The author suggests that urban parents, students and teachers are not aware that school counselors, in selecting a student's program of study, tracking students by ability, and selecting career tracks for students, often give poor advice to black students, assigning disproportionate numbers of black students to inferior learning environments. It is suggested that there is little likelihood of parents, students and teacher support in altering the current racist counseling process. (Author/KS)

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THE FUNCTION AND ROLE OF THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR IN URBAN SCHOOLS: A SURVEY

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by

Frank Brown

Faculty of Educational Studies

State University of New York at Buffalo

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Importance of the Counseling Function

In Brown Vs. the Board of Education, 1974, the United States Supreme Court ruled that black students must be given an equal chance to be exposed to the same educational environment as white students. Yet today, more than two decades later, individual schools, like the de facto segregated school systems prior to Brown, are still serving the same function of assigning of black students to inferior educational environments. If a black student is transferred from a superior track in an all black school to an inferior academic track in an integrated school, his educational environment has not improved even though the overall quality of the integrated school may be deemed superior. Or, if the black student should reside in the integrated school neighborhood, he may still find himself placed one or more tracks below his true academic potential. This, too, accomplishes what de facto segregated schools were designed to accomplish, and it is done with much less fanfare (Brown and Smith, 1976). This practice negates the intended benefits from the 1954 Supreme Court decision, and the practice is widespread (U.S. Civil Rights Commission, 1975; Brown and Smith, 1976; and Edelman, 1975). The school function designed to accomplish within school segregation by tracking is generally referred to as the counseling process. Therefore, it is hoped that this study will give some indication of how aware are black parents, students, and their teachers regarding the counseling process. The separation of students into different academic environments via tracking is perhaps the most important function performed by school counselors.

Background

Recently a large northern urban school district requested a feasibility study for a community policy board designed to govern a middle school. A

committee was appointed by the board of education to sample the opinion of students, parents, and teachers about the counseling process. The inquiry included the school under consideration for community control (community policy board) plus three other schools not involved in the feasibility study. However, one of the three schools not involved in the study is already a community controlled school.

Schools

School A. This school is not being considered for a community policy board; however, it is adjacent to School D that is under community control. The student population is all black. The principal is white and the teaching staff is 85 percent white. It is considered a typical junior high school, grades 7-9, with an enrollment of about 800 students. The community may be classified as poor or as one in which a majority of the residents are low income earners.

School B. School B is a junior high school, grades 7-9, with an enrollment of about 800 pupils. The student population is all black. School B is being considered for community control. The school's principal is black; however, the teaching staff is almost 90 percent white. The administration, teachers, students and parents are aware of the study and frequently express their agreement or disagreement with the concept of community control. The community is in the lower social-economic status category.

School C. School C is similar to School A and B except that it is not adjacent to another community controlled school, nor is it being considered for community control. School C's enrollment is about 800.

School D. School D is an elementary school, grades K-6, thus different from Schools A, B, and C. Only students in grade six responded to our inquiry. The school is community controlled. The principal is black, and the teaching staff is about 50 percent black. The student body is all black. The central board of education considers the community policy board a success. School D's enrollment is about 600.

After decades of fighting for quality education via a variety of strategies, mainly through racial integration of public schools and equity in the allocation of school resources, the black community is beginning to shift its attention toward the day-to-day school activities. Frustration caused by increased resistance to racial integration and a failure on the part of the states to provide equity in the allocation of the school resources, between and within school districts, may be a major cause for this shift in focus.

The one school function that has drawn significant attention from the black community is that performed by the school counselor. Black parents feel that their children are receiving poor advice from school counselors. Many school counselors may give black students poor advice because they are: (1) poorly trained; (2) racists; (3) make improper use of test results; (4) lacking essential human qualities such as acceptance, understanding, and sincerity; or (4) they lack effective communicative skills.

Because activities within the black subculture are generally different from that of the counselor, it is important for the counselor to integrate the values of the black subculture so that these values are viewed in a positive manner. This integration of values tends to eliminate friction caused by a denial of minority group values. But evidence suggests that many counselors still do not have a positive view of blacks. Therefore, the question arises

as to what limits should be imposed upon the authority of counselors to program students. The focus of this survey will concern itself with the authority of school counselors as viewed by students, parents and teachers.

The Study

A questionnaire was administered to a representative sample of students, parents, and teachers at the four schools. The sample included twenty students, twenty parents, and twenty teachers from each of the four schools. This resulted in a three by four factorial design, with an N of twenty per cell; the total N was 240. Results were tabulated and submitted to the central board of education as a part of the feasibility study's report

Respondents were asked to rank statements on school matters. The questionnaire made use of a likert type scale, ranging from 0 to 7. A zero (0) would indicate that an item was not very important, while a seven (7) would indicate that it is considered very important.

Categories used to aid in the interpretation of the findings are:

(1) Score 0-5.0, average importance or less;

(2) Score 5.1-7.0, better than average in importance.

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of several counseling functions:

1. Should the parent approve his child's program of study?
2. Should the parent give approval to changes in his child's program of study?
3. Should the counselor assist students with course selection?
4. Should the counselor select program direction for students?
5. Should the counselor assist students with changes in their program of study?
6. Should the counselor handle discipline problems?
7. Should the counselor arrange for parent-teacher conferences?

8. Should the counselor prepare student programs of study only with parental approval?

Findings

Should school counselors select courses for students? Students, parents, and teachers felt strongly that counselors should assist in the process. Students felt less strongly about the help, followed by teachers and parents, respectively. However, teachers in School D felt less sure that counselors should be involved in student programming.

Should counselors select programs for students? Parents, teachers, and students rated this service slightly above average. All respondents tended to agree that counselors should be involved in selecting a student's program of study.

Should counselors assist with changes in student programs? Students, parents, and teachers in School B rated this item lower than those in the other three schools, thus giving rise to a difference between schools and roles.

Should counselors handle discipline? The answer is "no" from all parties, with teachers giving it the lowest rating; parents and students rated this item about even.

Should counselors arrange for parent-teacher conferences? The answer is "yes". However, parents and teachers in School D rated it very low.

Should the students' programs of study have parental approval? This question received a somewhat less than average rating with students giving it the highest rating and parents the lowest.

Should parents approve a student's program of study? The answer is "yes"; however, teachers rated this item lower than students and parents. Parents and students gave it a similar rating.

Table I
Mean Scores by Role and School
(N = 240)

Items	Role (*) S=student P=parent T=teacher	Schools (**) A	B	C	D
1. Select courses for students.***	S	6.2	6.1	6.1	6.2
	P	6.9	6.5	6.9	6.5
	T	6.6	6.6	6.5	5.3
2. Select program direction for students.	S	4.0	4.9	5.3	6.3
	P	6.2	5.3	5.7	5.9
	T	6.1	5.5	5.5	5.9
3. Assist students with changes in program.***	S	5.6	5.4	6.1	6.3
	P	6.7	5.8	6.7	5.9
	T	6.6	6.3	6.1	5.9
4. Handle student discipline.*	S	4.2	5.0	5.0	6.2
	P	4.7	6.0	4.3	5.9
	T	3.3	3.2	2.6	5.7
5. Arrange parent-teacher conferences.**	S	5.5	5.8	5.6	6.0
	P	5.9	5.9	6.3	4.7
	T	5.2	6.1	5.2	4.7
6. Programs must have parental approval.**	S	5.2	5.6	4.8	6.3
	P	4.8	4.1	4.7	5.0
	T	4.8	5.2	4.1	5.1
7. Parents should approve program of study.*	S	4.9	6.1	5.4	6.2
	P	5.3	5.6	5.3	6.2
	T	5.2	4.7	3.9	5.8
8. Parents must approve changes in program of study.***	S	4.5	5.2	5.5	5.8
	P	5.6	4.4	4.7	4.9
	T	5.6	5.8	3.7	5.7

*Statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) exist between schools
**Statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) exist between roles - parents, students and teachers
***Interaction effects ($p < .05$) between school and role

Table II
Combined Mean Scores by School and Role
(N = 240)

Items	School				Role		
	A	B	C	D	Student	Parent	Teacher
1. Select courses for students.***	6.[illegible]	6.4	6.5	6.0	6.1	6.7	6.3
2. Select program direction for students.	5.4	5.2	5.5	6.0	5.5	5.8	5.7
3. Assist students with changes in program.***	6.3	5.8	6.3	6.0	5.8	6.3	6.2
4. Handle student discipline.*	4.1	4.8	3.9	6.0	5.1	5.2	3.7
5. Arrange parent-teacher conferences.**	5.5	5.9	5.7	5.1	5.7	5.7	5.3
6. Programs must have parental approval.**	4.9	5.0	4.5	5.4	5.4	4.6	4.8
7. Parents should approve programs of study.*	5.1	5.4	4.8	6.1	5.6	5.6	4.9
8. Parents must approve changes in programs of study.***	5.2	5.1	4.6	5.4	5.2	4.9	5.2

*Statistically significant at $p < .05$ for schools
**Statistically significant at $p < .05$ for roles
***Interaction effects ($p < .05$) between school and role

Should parents approve changes in a student's program of study? The feeling on this matter is not very strong with parents at the bottom. Students and teachers expressed similar views on this issue.

Conclusions

This study appears to confirm the findings of other surveys among poor people (N.Y. Times, November 2, 1974, p. 36c). While it is true that the judgment of a school counselor in placing their children in inferior educational environments guarantees them an inferior life, there are other more immediate and pressing problems. A Louis Harris poll of attitudes in Harlem for the New York Times (November 2, 1974, p. 36c) that asked blacks to select their biggest problem from among eight--crime, housing, drugs, dirty streets, unemployment, economic problems, education, and noise--found education just nosing out noise for last place. This was also generally true for whites and Spanish American residents of Harlem. Further, a state-wide study by the New York State Education Department found the worth of school guidance counseling belittled (N.Y. Times, October 4, 1974); a Gallup poll of students in 1974 found that students ranked five non-academic school matters ahead of academic ones: discipline, integration, money, drugs, and "good" teachers (Buffalo Evening News, November 27, 1974).

Findings from this study and others would suggest that broad-based support from parents, students, and teachers to alter the current counseling process is not likely to come about in the near future to correct abuses by school counselors in assigning black students to inferior educational environments. Therefore, it seems clear that the state through legislative action and the courts through judicial decree will have to take decisive action to

enforce the intent of Brown Vs. The Board of Education. Evidence collected by the U. S. Civil Rights Commission (1975) and others (Brown and Smith, 1976; Edelman, 1975) strongly suggest that schools are using the counseling function to assign a disproportionate number of black students to inferior educational environments.

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